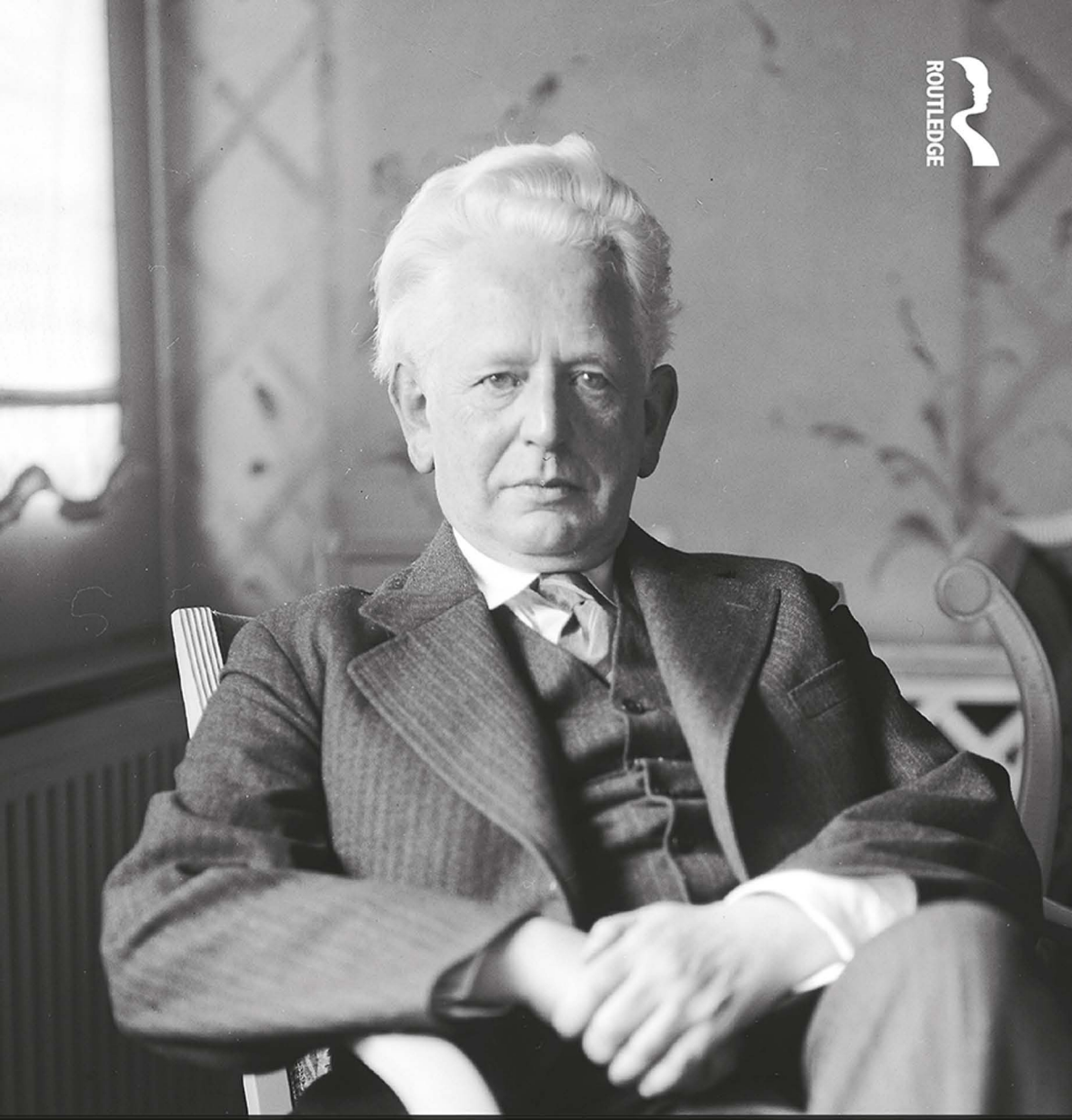

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SYMBOLIC FORMS

Ernst Cassirer

Volume 3: Phenomenology of Cognition

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 3: Phenomenology of Cognition

"In his *Phenomenology of Cognition*, Cassirer provides a comprehensive and systematic account of the dynamic process involved in the whole of human culture as it progresses from the world of myth and its feeling of social belonging to the highest abstractions of mathematics, logic and theoretical physics. Cassirer engages with the most sophisticated and cutting-edge work in fields ranging from ethnology to classics, egyptology and assyriology to ethology, brain science and psychology to logic, mathematics and theoretical physics. His command of philosophy, literature, and the arts is superb.

Echoing his work on Kant, Cassirer begins *The Philosophy of Symbolic Form*s with the problem posed by the meaning of being for philosophy since Plato. But Cassirer also shows that this problem gains new significance with Kant and with the development of modern culture. Cassirer weaves his conception of the development of knowledge into a broadly Kantian and German idealist dynamic-historical conception of significance and of experience that refuses to accept a fundamental opposition between literary, philosophical and scientific culture. In consequence of his great vision grounded in careful reflection and argument, Cassirer's systematic conception of the Copernican cosmopolitan-cosmological revolution is still philosophically and scientifically unmatched in contemporary philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic and of the Pacific."

Pierre Keller, Professor of Philosophy, University of California, Riverside, USA.

This new translation makes Cassirer's seminal work available to a new generation of scholars. Each volume includes a translator's introduction by Steve G. Lofts, a foreword by Peter E. Gordon, a glossary of key terms, and an index.

Ernst Cassirer was born in Germany 1874 in the city of Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). He taught at Hamburg University from 1919 to 1933, and then at All Souls College, Oxford, before emigrating to Sweden and then to the United States. Through its creative interpretation of Kant's philosophy combined with a deep knowledge of the role of language and culture, Cassirer's work

is regarded as indispensable to understanding the relationship between the two major traditions in twentieth-century philosophy, the "analytic" and the "continental". Cassirer's philosophy is unique, as it sought a common ground between the scientific and humanistic worldviews which frequently divided these two traditions, exemplified in his famous debate with Martin Heidegger at Davos in 1929. His work resulted in the monumental *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as well as several books on the philosophy of humanism and the Enlightenment. He taught at the universities of Yale and Columbia in the early 1940s and died in New York in 1945.

Steve G. Lofts is Professor of Philosophy at King's University College, Canada. He is the translator of Cassirer's *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences* and *The Warburg Years (1919–1933): Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*.

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 3

Phenomenology of Cognition

Ernst Cassirer
Translated by Steve G. Lofts

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Foreword

Peter E. Gordon

Some works of philosophy reflect the time in which they were written, others recall an earlier age, and still others seem to anticipate a time yet to come. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has suffered the peculiar fate of a work that seemed *unzeitgemäß*, or out of tune with its time. First published in the 1920s, during the brief and troubled era of the Weimar Republic, it was intended for a cultured readership that was either rapidly disappearing or had not yet appeared, an intellectual world in which the memory of German Idealism could still inspire and the last embers of European humanism had not ceased to glow. Its author, Ernst Cassirer, belonged to that distinctive stratum of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie, a small fragment of the Central European educated classes or *Bildungsbürgertum* for whom culture had become a kind of ersatz religion and who held fast to the values of Universalism and the Enlightenment even as the surrounding culture succumbed to nationalism and intolerance. Cassirer was among the hundreds of thousands of intellectuals and artists whose careers in Germany came to an end by the brutal fiat of National Socialist legislation in 1933. He fled with his wife into exile, and after two years in Oxford and a longer stay in Göteborg, Sweden, he spent his final years in the United States. Since his death in 1945, his philosophical legacy has survived in the uncertain twilight of a culture that can no longer identify with his ideals. But no work of philosophy should suffer the ignominy of being turned into a mere monument of the past. The crucial question is whether we can still read it today and, if so, how.

"The human mind," wrote Goethe, "will not be confined to any limits." Cassirer was Goethe's spiritual stepchild. His masterpiece, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, was a belated contribution to a philosophical genre that Goethe would have admired, especially for its readiness to break with academic convention by exploring all domains of human expression, from language to myth, from religion to science. Cassirer came from an accomplished family of artists and scientists: among his cousins were Richard, an esteemed neurologist, and Paul, a gallery owner and art collector who played a major role in promoting the works of the Berlin Secession and Postimpressionists such as Van Gogh and Cézanne. In his philosophy, these seemingly disparate domains are understood as stemming from a common source, the expressive capacity or formative principle that belongs to the human being as an *animal symbolicum*. For Cassirer, the mind is not a passive faculty that merely receives impressions from the external world but rather an active faculty that constitutes those impressions by investing them with order and meaning. The symbolic is the very principle of intelligibility whose powers leave nothing untouched. As it presses outward into all domains of experience, the mind comes to recognize itself in its own symbolic achievements. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is nothing less than the philosophical record of these efforts.

Cassirer came to this task well equipped with conceptual instruments that he had already honed to precision after years of philosophical research. His earlier works reflect a rigorous training in the philosophical methods associated with Hermann Cohen and the so-called Marburg School of neo-Kantianism, which first emerged in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a philosophical reaction against the preceding age of metaphysical extravagance. The neo-Kantians were a diverse group but united in the conviction that philosophy could only move forward only if it went "back to Kant," and this meant reconceiving philosophy as a rigorous inquiry into the transcendental conditions for objective knowledge. Thanks to the reawakening of Kant's philosophy at Marburg, Cassirer first turned his attention to the philosophical foundations of the natural sciences. He was especially keen to understand the epistemological principles of classical and modern physics, in which obsolete and metaphysical concepts of "substance" had been gradually supplanted by modern concepts of pure "function." In Einstein's theory of relativity,

for example, our basic concepts cannot be construed as mere "copies" of immediate material data; they are instead "represented as constructed projects" of our own thinking. The concept of being is replaced by the concept of order.

This insight into the epistemological revolution in modern physics first permitted Cassirer to realize the unique importance of the symbolic. In the early 1920s, Cassirer also made the acquaintance of Aby Warburg, whose unusual library at Hamburg became a kind of spiritual home and the place where he came to appreciate the richness and diversity of world culture and mythological belief. In fact, it would not be misleading to describe *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as an attempt to provide the Warburg Library with a transcendental foundation. Here Cassirer presented his famous address, "The Concept of Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences" (his inaugural publication for the Warburg Library), in which he laid out his definition of a symbolic form as "every energy of spirit by which the content of spiritual signification is linked to a concrete and intrinsically appropriate sensuous sign."[1] Symbolic forms serve as the common intellectual framework for all systems of human meaning – in myth, religion, language, and science – all of which bear witness to the idea that "our consciousness does not content itself with receiving impressions from the outside, rather it links and penetrates every impression with a free activity of expression."[2] When they are understood as the fruit of human symbolization, even the most "primitive" or "irrational" moments in human culture are revealed as belonging to a shared world of "self-created signs and images."

In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, this general principle serves as the point of departure for a transcendental inquiry into the most diverse forms of symbolic expression. However, we must not mistake this project for a mindless celebration of cultural diversity that would blur all essential distinctions between science and myth, reason and unreason. Cassirer is committed to a deeper and more expansive kind of rationalism – a humanism without limits. But he organizes his philosophical inquiry in a developmentalist narrative that charts the self-education of the human species. We can think of the book as an attempt to historicize the Kantian theory of form: myth can play a crucial role in the structuring of experience only until it yields dialectically to the more sophisticated symbolic

forms of monotheistic religion, and in the very same way religion must yield to the consciously self-created forms of modern science. In this narrative of symbolization, each stage is assigned a suitable role, though none of them can compromise the underlying narrative of human enlightenment. Unsurprisingly, the third volume of Cassirer's project is called *The Phenomenology of Cognition*, an implicit homage to the Hegelian idea of a phenomenology as a story of the mind's progressive efforts to achieve the fullest and most rational form of self-realization. For Cassirer, as for his German idealist antecedents, this narrative of self-realization is not only epistemological but also cultural and political: the human being comes to know itself only if it also comes to recognize itself as the author of its own fate. Cassirer's work thus implies a strong commitment to modern democracy.

Nearly a century has passed since the first volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* appeared in 1923, and over this broad timespan, certain features of Cassirer's work have grown antiquated and unpersuasive. For those who can no longer accept Enlightenment-inspired appeals to progress in a modern world that made Auschwitz a possibility, the evolutionist principle that underwrites Cassirer's philosophy may seem altogether intolerable. But we should not hasten to dismiss him too quickly as a thinker from a more optimistic age. At the end of his life, in his last and posthumously published study, *The Myth of the State* (1945), he acknowledged the contemporary power of modern political myths, such as those that had become official ideology in the Third Reich. He specifically warns that these myths are not organic products of the human mind; although ancient myths served proto-rational aims, the modern myths are artificial things that can be manufactured at will. It is an insight that he shared with the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, who compressed the dialectic of regression into an aphorism: "myth is already enlightenment, but Enlightenment reverts to myth." Nor should we neglect the striking affinities that connect Cassirer's philosophy of language and myth to later themes in French structuralism. A neglected line of argument runs from Cassirer's analysis of the symbolic forms of mythical thinking to the unconscious rules of totemism and myth examined by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his structuralist anthropology.

Cassirer's philosophy also anticipates a methodological perspective that we now associate with Michel Foucault. The suggestion is not as

surprising as it may seem. Foucault was quite familiar with Cassirer's work, and in 1966 he even wrote a review of Cassirer's study of the Enlightenment. That same year, he also published *Les mots et les choses* (known in English as *The Order of Things*), and readers of the book may note its resemblance with *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Both are attempts to excavate the *a priori* structures that manifest themselves in all spheres of human culture and knowledge. Moreover, both insist that these *a priori* structures or symbolic forms are not historically invariant but instead susceptible to radical changes over time. In documenting these tectonic shifts, Cassirer not infrequently characterizes them in Aristotelian terms as a "μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος," or a transition into an entirely different genus. What Foucault called an "archaeology of knowledge" involves a similar emphasis on the discontinuity between one episteme and another. Notwithstanding this remarkable similarity, however, there is at least one crucial difference: Foucault sees these *a priori* structures as *anonymous*. They appear all at once, as if from nowhere, and he has little interest in offering a metaphysical explanation for their point of origin. Unlike Cassirer, he refuses to see them as manifestations of the formative power of human consciousness, since he regards all such appeals to transcendental humanism with the deepest skepticism. The expressive model of human consciousness that serves as the grounds of Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms is, from Foucault's perspective, merely a surface phenomenon of a uniquely modern episteme that may soon disappear. This places Foucault in a difficult position of affirming structures of meaning while disavowing human consciousness as their source. With this paradoxical doctrine, Foucault takes his place in a long tradition of modern critiques of transcendental humanism that extend back at least as far as Heidegger. But we might ask ourselves whether it is plausible to speak of meaning if one does not offer some account of meaning's genesis. Adopting an attitude of knowing condescension toward seemingly obsolete doctrines of transcendental humanism is easier than supplying a worthy alternative.

This was a major bone of contention in the famous 1929 confrontation between Cassirer and Heidegger in Davos, Switzerland. If Heidegger appeared to many eyewitnesses as the victor in this dispute, this was because he was willing to abandon the doctrine of transcendental humanism that had remained a dominant fixture in modern academic

philosophy at least since Kant. Cassirer, by contrast, had little interest in surrendering this doctrine, since his entire philosophy was premised on the notion that symbolic forms are the manifestation of the "pure activity of spirit." Without this notion, he feared that the ideal of objectivity in both scientific knowledge and ethics would collapse. Unlike Heidegger, he emphasized mental spontaneity, the mind's uninhibited freedom in the constitution of its world. Cassirer accused Heidegger of turning his back on objectivity and retreating into a kind of pragmatic relativism where space and time were reduced to merely "existential" categories without objective form.

History has not been kind to Cassirer, but we should ask ourselves if his criticism was so wide of the mark. It was Cassirer, after all, who grasped the philosophical implications of the natural sciences and especially modern mathematics and physics, whereas Heidegger betrayed the superficiality of his thinking on all such matters when he declared that "science does not think." Today when so many of our contemporary problems confront us with the need to move beyond the unfortunate divide between the natural sciences and the humanities, Cassirer's philosophy may offer greater promise. All the same, Heidegger may have been right to suggest that the old dogma of transcendental humanism could not be sustained without a covert appeal to metaphysics. Cassirer occasionally reads as if he meant to give up on metaphysics to develop a kind of phenomenology without foundationalism. But most of these gestures are only half-convincing. The urgent point of dispute at Davos remained unsolved: can there be objectivity without metaphysics?

One solution was developed by philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas, who delivered a lecture in Hamburg in 1995 on the dual occasion of the rededication of the Warburg Library and the fiftieth anniversary of Cassirer's death. Habermas expressed in his lecture great admiration for Cassirer and extoled him as a champion of democracy and Enlightenment at a moment in German history when such champions were all too few. But he also suggested that *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* did not succeed in liberating itself from the conventional paradigm of a "philosophy of consciousness." For Habermas, the philosophy of consciousness is the name for any philosophical doctrine that describes meaning from the isolated perspective of a transcendental subject who

comes to know the world primarily through representations. Over the course of the twentieth century, many philosophers have come to see this paradigm as antiquated and indefensible, chiefly because it relies on a crypto-metaphysical conception of a transcendental subject who stands beyond its own field of operation. It serves as the grounds of meaning but can give no account of its own genesis. Habermas tries to resolve this dilemma without following the path of metaphysical skeptics such as Heidegger and Foucault. Instead, he understands objective meaning as the shared creation of an irreducible plurality of subjects who build up the world through intersubjective communication and praxis. This solution helps to secure the objectivity of our language and our moral-political commitments even though it is an objectivity that has dispensed with the need for metaphysical grounds. This ideal of an intersubjectively validated objectivity derives originally from the German idealists, but one can glimpse in Cassirer's thinking a certain anticipation of Habermas' solution.

The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms is an ambivalent work that sits at the boundary between two epochs in the history of philosophy. It points in the direction of a post-metaphysical theory of the symbolic without wholly liberating itself from the older paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. We can occasionally glimpse its author as he struggles to overcome his own philosophical inheritance, even if its authority remains too strong. This may help to explain the strange feeling of untimeliness that seems to emanate from the pages of this unusual work. Cassirer himself was a man between epochs, a contemporary of Einstein who could effortlessly call to mind lines of poetry from Schiller and Goethe. Though unashamed of his origins, he was indifferent to the claims of nation and tribe; he saw in Judaism only one source for the rational universalism that was the common inheritance of all cultures. A humanist philosopher in an age of extremes, he was in many ways the supreme representative of a world in eclipse. Although he was fortunate enough to escape the European catastrophe, he did not live long enough to see the new world that would emerge from the ruins. Whether he could have felt at home in this new age of specialization is doubtful. Erudition today is a rare commodity, and it has become just one commodity among others. For good or for ill, philosophers these days no longer have the habit of quoting Goethe. But if we look past

these marks of old-world erudition, we may yet find that *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* can come alive with new insights that even its author may never have anticipated. No genuine work of philosophy belongs only to the past.

ENDNOTES

1 Cf. Cassirer, "The Concept of Symbolic Form in the Construction of the Human Sciences," in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. Steve Lofts with Antonio Calcagno, 76.
2 Ibid., 76.

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I would like to thank Samantha Matherne (Philosophy, Harvard University) for her comments and insights on this Forward.

Translator's Preface

Steve G. Lofts

The following translation has been made from both the original Bruno Cassirer editions and volumes 11, 12, and 13 of the *Gesammelte Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*, edited by Birgit Recki and with text and notes prepared by Claus Rosenkranz and Julia Clemens. The translation of "'Geist' und 'Leben' in der Philosophie der Gegenwart" ("'Spirit' and 'Life' in Contemporary Philosophy") that appears in the Appendix to Volume 3 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has been made from volume 17 of the *Gesammelte Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe*. This paper is mentioned by Cassirer in the Preface to Volume 3 and has been included to provide the reader new to Cassirer with an idea of the problematic that would come to preoccupy him.

The original pagination of the Hamburg edition is found in the margins of the translation. All the footnotes that appear within brackets are translator's notes. As the Hamburg edition is a critical edition, its editorial apparatus is extensive and as such contains a great deal of detailed information. Only the footnotes that seem most appropriate for this translation have been included. Unless a reference to an official English translation appears, all translations of the material quoted in German or French by Cassirer are my own. Official translations have often been amended so that the language of technical terms is consistent. Substantial changes to the translation have been noted. English translations for

the Greek and Latin are included in parentheses where the translation was not given by Cassirer himself.

An attempt has been made to produce a translation that is close and faithful to the original German and to preserve the original feel of Cassirer's voice and style while providing a readable text in contemporary English. Cassirer writes in a clear, elegant, and poetic German. As with any translation, decisions have been made as to when it was more important to remain faithful to the letter of the text and when it was necessary to side with the spirit of the text. Beyond the typical challenges encountered in any translation, the translator of Cassirer is confronted with a particular problem. Other than "symbolic form" and "symbolic pregnance," Cassirer does not coin a new technical language; rather, he employs the language of German Idealism and the technical language of scientific research, bringing a number of thinkers and scientific disciplines into dialogue. He often, however, provides these terms with a new sense. Where possible, the standard translations of these technical terms have been adopted. In some cases, however, there are differences in translation traditions. For example, *Erkenntnisse* is rendered as "knowledge" or "cognition" by different translators. It has, therefore, often been necessary to choose, from among the alternatives, standard translations on the basis of what was the best overall fit in the context of Cassirer's thought.

At times it has been necessary to deviate from standard translations of certain German terms to capture subtle distinctions that would appear to be synonyms and thus would normally be translated by the same English term. Because it is not always possible to translate a German term by using only one English term, in some cases more than one translation has been adopted. Like most philosophers, Cassirer has a tendency to select terms that allow him to make allusions or connect terms through the structure or morphology of the word, such as *Gestalt* (gestalt, figure, or shape), *gestalten* (to configure), and *Gestaltung* (configuration): *Bild* (image), *bilden* (forming), *Bildung* (formation), etc. Where it was thought important to the understanding or simply to the appreciation of the nuances of the text, the German has been included in parentheses.

While a translation should not attempt to remove an author's gender-based language, by the same token it should not introduce gender-based language where it does not exist. There are three genders in German: the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter. The problem occurs when

we translate terms like *der Mensch* (the human or the human being) or *das Einzelne* (the individual). For if we employ the pronoun "he" in these cases, we are in fact introducing gender-based language that does not exist in Cassirer's text. The concern here is not one of political but of philosophical correctness. When we speak of "the human," we are speaking not of individual human beings but of what it means to be human *qua* human. When speaking of the "individual," the problem is compounded by the fact that Cassirer is at times speaking of *the* individual *qua* individual and at times he is speaking of *an* individual as a unique person. Whereas *the* individual *qua* individual is neither he nor she, *an* individual as a unique person is always he or she. As a basic principle, this translation endeavors not to introduce gender-specific language where it did not already exist. A number of strategies have been employed toward this goal. "*Der Mensch*" is translated as "the human" or "the human being" – the term "man" appears only when it is in an English text quoted by Cassirer or in one of his English works. In some cases, a simple restructuring of the sentence was needed to remove the pronoun or permit a repetition of the noun "the human." Generally, "the human" and "the subject" have received the pronoun "it" and the possessive pronoun "its." In a handful of cases, where it was clear that the subject of the sentence was singular, the word "they," "their," or "themself" has been used as a singular pronoun to refer to the subject or individual of an unspecified gender. This praxis dates back to the sixteenth century and is currently widely employed in informal language usage and more and more in formal contexts. Finally, in a handful of cases where Cassirer was clearly speaking of a concrete individual, both pronouns have been employed as the assumption is that the point being made would be true for women and for men.

The goal of a translation should not be to interpret for the reader but rather to facilitate the reader in undertaking their own interpretation. This said, there is always a degree of interpretation that cannot be avoided. Here is not the place to go through all the reasons for translating a term one way as opposed to another. Other translations are possible, and some choices cannot be made except on the bases of an interpretation of Cassirer's philosophy as a whole, and in some instances, the German has been included in parentheses so that the reader is free to interpret the text differently.

Translator's Introduction

A Phenomenology of Symbolic Creative Cognition: The Unfolding of the Symbolic Function and the Construction of a Pure Theory of the Symbolic

Steve G. Lofts

The third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* draws at least five basic interconnected, systematic consequences from the results of the first two volumes. First, "it strives to make visible . . . the newly acquired concept of 'theory' in its whole scope and in the wealth of possible configurations that are harbored in it. [Second, it] strives to show how those other spiritual strata [that the analysis of language and myth has uncovered] spread under [*unterbreitet*] and support [*unterbaut*] the stratum of conceptual, 'discursive' cognition; and [third,] in the constant view to and review of this substructure [*Unterbau*], [it attempts] to determine the particular nature, organization, and architectonics of the 'superstructure' of science." Fourth, it sets out to show how science and philosophy historically and systematically develop in and through an "*Auseinandersetzung* with the linguistic and mythical worlds" and, indeed, through an *Auseinandersetzung* with each other: how the strictly scientific concept of the world frees itself from the "natural world concept." And finally, it establishes

the symbolic function as the guiding and unifying creative principle of life, reality, spirit, perception, intuition, and natural cognition.

Thus, although volume three marks a return to the problem of cognition and the construction and organization of the "theoretical worldview" that was undertaken in *Substance and Function* (1910), it does so with a much broader and diversified conception of "cognition" and, as a result, with a wealth of new problems. In *Substance and Function*, "cognition" was limited to that form of "scientific cognition" that is found in the exact sciences. However, cognition is now taken in the widest and most comprehensive sense: Cassirer now "understands by cognition not only the act of scientific comprehending (*Begreifen*) and theoretical explanation, but every spiritual activity in which we construct for ourselves a 'world' in its characteristic configuration, in its order, and in its 'being a certain way' (*Sosein*)." "The philosophy of symbolic forms is not concerned exclusively *or even primarily* with the purely scientific, exact world-comprehending (*Weltbegreifen*); but with all the tendencies of world-understanding (*Weltverstehen*)" that undertake "the *Auseinandersetzung* by which the opposition of I and world first takes place in a specific form in the spheres of myth, art, and theoretical cognition."

Each mode of world-understanding (*Weltverstehen*) possesses its own index of sense, mode of objectivity, and dimension of truth. As we saw above, each mode of world-understanding (*Weltverstehen*) would be "'relativized' with regard to the others, but since this 'relativization' is throughout reciprocal . . . no single form but only the systematic totality can serve as the expression of 'truth' and 'reality.'" In fundamental agreement with Hegel, Cassirer therefore maintains that the "truth is the 'whole' – this whole, however, cannot be given all at once but must be unfolded progressively by thought." Such is the task of a phenomenology of cognition: to join the first beginnings and starting points with the end and determine their logical and lawful unity: unfold the links in the chain that leads from the *terminus a quo* to the *terminus ad quem*. However, in difference to Hegel, the unity sought after cannot be one based in a substance metaphysics:

> Symbolic idealism begins *not from the simplicity of things (substance), but from the unity of function* . . . . It is only in the manifoldness of symbolic directions that the unity (*Einheit*) of spirit – not as substantial simplicity (*substantielle Einfachheit*), but as functional manifoldness – presents itself. The spirit is one (*eins*), in that in the multiplicity of manifold

> directions of action it becomes conscious of its *identity* (as action in general).[1]

Thus, the philosophy of symbolic forms is, Cassirer insists, not a "metaphysics of cognition" but a "phenomenology of cognition": phenomenology understood in the basic sense given it by Hegel and not the modern sense given it by Husserl. From a certain perspective, then, volume 3 marks a return to the initial project of a "phenomenology of cognition," which was the original title of his philosophical project in 1923 (cf. x). However, Cassirer's thought seems to have evolved and matured: we find here a number of new conceptual elements, themes, and terminological developments that arguably give only new expression to ideas already implicit in other works but that indicate a refining and recasting of his philosophical position in part as a response to developments in scientific thought that had occurred since he began his work (in particular developments in physics, gestalt psychology, and cognitive science) and in part as a response to contemporary debates (in particular, the furthering debates concerning the crisis in the foundations of mathematics) and new trends in philosophy (in particular, the rise of Lebensphilosophie).

We find the broadening of the notion of "theory" beyond its restricted use to refer to a conceptual system of scientific cognition. "In the continuous movement of spirit, all seeing [*Sehen*], to speak with Goethe, passes directly into a considering, all considering into a musing [*Sinnen*], all musing [*Sinnen*] into a connecting, so that in every attentive glance into the world we are theorizing." Again, quoting Goethe, Cassirer insists about "'Fact' and 'Theory' [that] the highest thing would be to recognize that everything factual (*Faktische*) is already theory." The factum, however, is no longer restricted to the factum of science, and theory is thus no longer limited to the scientific cognition of the world but is implicated in every specific mode of configuration. The scientific cognition of the world involves "pure theory." All "seeing" (*Sehen*) is thus a seeing through the "sight" (*Sicht*) of spirit. That all fact is theory laden is not new: it has been one of the cornerstones of Cassirer's philosophical outlook since *Substance and Function*. What is new is the explicit broadening and differentiating of "theory" and its correlate distinction between "seeing" (*Sehen*) and "sight" (*Sicht*), which is not found in the first two volumes. In works prior to 1927, Cassirer uses the term "theory" to refer only to a

philosophical or scientific "theory." And the terms "*Sehen*" and "*Sicht*"[2] are employed only in a non-technical sense.

The next innovation concerns what is seen as the central concept of Cassirer's philosophy: *Symbolische Prägnanz*. The concept appears for the first time in Chapter V, "Symbolic Pregnance," and does not figure in his earlier works. Where "Prägnanz" is employed, it has a non-technical sense as in the case of the expression "sharp and concise" (*Prägnanz*). What is more, it is rare in Cassirer's later works and does not appear at all in *An Essay on Man*. The concept has a particular role in a phenomenology of cognition and addresses another aspect of the dualism that Cassirer located at the very basis of metaphysical thought, which the theory of the symbolic function was seeking to overcome.

Symbolic pregnance must be understood within the context of Cassirer's Hegelian-styled phenomenology of cognition but also within his interpretation of the history of thought – the two are arguably connected. In *Substance and Function*, Cassirer writes:

> The modern expositions of logic have attempted to take account of their circumstance by opposing – in accordance with a well-known distinction of Hegel's – the abstract universality of the concept to the concrete universality of the mathematical formula.[3]

Hegel distinguishes between the speculative concept of reason and that of the understanding. The understanding (*Verstehen*), for Hegel, differentiates one concept from another but is unable to unite this opposition: it is locked into a binary logic of either/or: either mind or body, either universal or particular, either the community or the individual, either sense (Sinn) or sensibility. The concepts of speculative reason [*Vernunft*], however, are negative and dialectical and thus are able to resolve the opposition into a unity of the determination in their opposition as an identity in difference. Hegel identifies speculative reason with objectified concrete universals and distinguishes them from abstract universals. Abstract universality negates particularity and levels down a group of individuals as being identical with each other in some respect. By contrast, the concrete universal expresses, manifests, itself in and through the different particularizations of the universal, which are held within it as part of the universal's

sense. Like the concrete universal, the functional concept of mathematics allows no separation between the universal (law) and the particulars of the ordered series. What Cassirer calls the "genuine concept" and "symbolic function" are a generalization of Hegel's concrete universal and a rethinking of Kant's schema. Speaking of the mathematical function in *Substance and Function*, Cassirer maintains that "the genuine concept does not disregard the peculiarities and particularities which it holds under it but seeks to show the necessity of the occurrence and connection of just these particularities." And again, in volume 3, Cassirer writes: "The genuine concept turns away from the world of intuition only in order to lead back to it with all the greater certainty: it serves for the regulation, the determination [*der Bestimmung, der Determination*] of the particular itself." Symbolic pregnance designates that originary relationship of identity in difference between form and matter, sense and sensibility, universal law and particular, unitary organizational whole (*Gliederung*) and organized individual part (*Glied*[4]) that forms the gestalt (*Gestalt*) that is a product of configuration (*Gestaltung*) undertaken by the different modes of the symbolic function. As such, it is the generating relation that produces out of itself an organized whole: be it that of the organic, the community, the mathematical, the scientific, or the philosophical. It is the most general statement of Kant's schema, Hegel's concrete universal, and the genuine function concept. Cassirer traces this functional relational concept back from Hegel's concrete universal through Kant's schema, Leibniz's differential calculus, and Descartes' theory of mathematics, which is at odds with his substantialist theory of the *res cogitans*, and ultimately to Heractlitus' concept of logos as polemos.

The next innovation forms the structure of the entire volume and arguably the whole of Cassirer's mature philosophy of the symbolic. Cassirer now internally differentiates the "symbolic function" into a series of functions: the expressive function [*Ausdrucksfunktion*], the presentative function [*Darstellungsfunktion*], and the significative function [*Bedeutungsfunktion*]. While the terms *Ausdruck*, *Darstellung*, and *Bedeutung* can be found in Cassirer's work before 1927, they are not systematically related together as interlocking concepts. What is more, one does not find the terms *Ausdrucksfunktion*,[5] *Darstellungsfunktion*,[6] and *Bedeutungsfunktion*[7] before 1927, when they become *technicus terminus* that operate as the main framework of Cassirer's philosophy of the symbolic. In "The Problem of the Symbol

in Philosophy" (1927), Cassirer provides us with a clear statement of how we are to understand this distinction:

> If we take this general differentiation of the functions of expression, presentation, and signification as our basis, which I can, of course, no more than sketch for you, then we possess a general plan of ideal orientation within which we can now indicate to a certain extent the position of each symbolic form. Of course, this position cannot be fixed once and for all such that it could be referred to within the basic plan by a fixed point. On the contrary, it is characteristic for each form that, in the various phases of its development and in the different stages of its spiritual construction, it has a different relationship to the three basic poles that we have tried to distinguish here. It shifts from place to place in this development, and by virtue of this movement it is able to attain its own area of being and meaning; it reaches its completion and internal limits.[8]

The three ideal poles form an *x*, *y*, *z* axes and planes that correspond to specific symbolic functions. This coordinate system of relational planes forms the ideal framework in which the different modes of symbolic configuration are to be situated, understood, and related to each other. Volume 3 is divided according to this triadic division of boundary concepts, each part focusing on one of these three interconnecting functions of the symbolic and connecting them to the domains of objective spirit that Cassirer designates as the symbolic forms of culture. Part 1 deals with the *Ausdrucksfunktion* and the *Ausdruckswelt* of myth; Part 2 examines the problem of language and *Repräsentation* and the construction (*Aufbau*) of the *intuitive world*; Part 3 turns to the *Bedeutungsfunktion* and the construction of scientific cognition (*wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis*).

In the notes for volume 4, which was to treat the metaphysics of the symbolic function, Cassirer sets out the following table that makes clear the structure of volume 3:

Hermeneutik	a) Expression	=	"Understanding" (*Verstehen*)	–	"Life"
	b) Presentation	=	"Intuition"	–	"Gestalt"
interpretatio naturae	c) Signification	=	"Cognizing"	–	"Law"

Part 1 of volume 3 thus provides an epistemo-critical analysis of the expressive function in our understanding of life. The mode of understanding *Verstehen* must be distinguished from that of *Verstanden*. *Verstehen* involves a hermeneutics of concrete praxis, a lived awareness of intelligibility (such as speaking a language, using a tool, living in a culture, or understanding a work of art or a person) that is foreign to *Verstanden* which involves situating something intellectually and giving an objective account of it: we understand (*Verstehen*) life in living it, but we cannot always explain it and therefore do not understand (*Verstanden*) it. In the case of *Verstehen*, it makes little sense to speak of a "correct" understanding of an expression such as a work of art: in the case of *Verstanden*, by contrast, we can speak of the "correct" objective account of something. Expression itself is a base phenomenon, it is a primal stratum in which there are no divisions, certainly no subject-object division. Myth is the *Auseinandersetzung* with life in and through which expression is first configured into the world of a lived understanding of life. A sense of "livingness in general" is understood and lived through the expressive function. Cassirer's entire philosophy seeks to move beyond the dualisms of a substantial metaphysics: in particular, the mind-body dualism and the problem of solipsism. Cassirer distinguishes between "expressive perception" [*Ausdruckswahrnehmung*], which is mediated by the expressive function, and "thing perception" [*Dingwahrnehmung*], which is mediated by the "presentative function" and the "significative function." Expressive perception and thing perception are different modes of perception and not simply the perception of different objects. All perception is saturated by the symbolic function: expressive perception makes manifest the lived-experience of life, one's own life lived in the flesh of the lived body (*Leib*), the foreign centers of life of the other, the life of the community, and life as such. Although in the move to scientific cognition, the sphere of lived expressive perception is progressively transposed into the form of tangible existence, into the causal relations of thing perception, it can never be entirely negated or sublated. "If we were to think of this basic function as sublated, the access to the world of 'inner experience' would be barred to us – the bridge which alone can lead us into the sphere of the 'you' would be cut. Every attempt to replace the primary function of expression by other 'higher' functions, whether intellectual or aesthetic, leads only to inadequate surrogates, which can never achieve what is demanded of them."

In Part 2, Cassirer turns his attention to the manifestation of the presentative function [*Darstellungsfunktion*] in representation (*Repräsentation*) and in the linguistic construction of the intuitive world and the establishment of the "natural world concept." The translation of *Darstellung* as presentation follows the Cambridge translation of Kant. For Kant, if cognition is to have a connection to a given object, then this object must be given in some manner: this "being giving" in sensible intuition is what is meant by presentation (*Darstellung*) (cf. CPR, B 195). The representation (*Vorstellung*) by which an object is thought is its concept. However, the object must be presented immediately in intuition. Thus, the presentative function is that aspect of the symbolic that renders the concept sensibly present in intuition. Through the presentative function of the symbolic, the idea (*Vorstellung*) – e.g., the idea of a mountain – is made sensible as an object of intuition of a mountain. This process of presenting (*darstellen*) is undertaken by the productive creative force of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as the formation (*Bildung*) of an image (*Bild*). The presentation, however, is not taken as a "re-representation" of something else existing beyond it but as the actual presence of the thing (*Sache*) itself, as the formation (*Gebilden*) that stands there (Da) ordered in the position of presence (*Dar-stellung*); beyond the "da" of the presencing, there is nothing. The mountain I see is indeed an image (*Bild*), but this image (*Bild*) is not an "image of" a mountain, an *Abbild*, but the mountain itself. In mythical consciousness, for example:

> the presentation (*Darstellung*) of the god . . . grasps the god in his wholly immediate living presence (*Genewart*); for the presentation (*Darstellung*) is not intended to be taken as a mere picture (*Abbild*); rather, it is the god itself who is embodied and active in it.

The presentation is distinguished from "representation" (*Repräsentation*), which connects the content of one presentation to another. Where the presentative function no longer merges, as in mythical consciousness, with the immediate living presence (*Genewart*), the sensible-intuitive content can be taken as a "representative" (*Vertreter*), as a "representation" (*Repräsentation*) of an other intuitive presentation; in both *Vertreter* and *Repräsentation*, the English reader should think of the representative who stands in for the whole. In language, one element is recognized as

standing for, representing, the whole. "The act of 'recognition' is necessarily bound up with the function of 'representation' (*Repräsentation*) and presupposes it." Language is the "vehicle for 'recognition' [*Rekognition*] in the concept." However, no matter how far language advances, it can never break from the lived intuitive content of primary expressive lived-experience. Whereas the expressive function forms the ground for the expressive perception of the lived body and other life-centers, the presentative function forms the ground for thing perception. Thus, in Part 1, Cassirer provides an epistemo-critical analysis of the construction of the self and others, whereas in Part 2, his focus turns to the construction of the intuitive-objective world in space and time. Part 2 ends with a long chapter on the pathology of symbolic cognition in which Cassirer's analysis points the way to the emerging field of cultural neuroscience.

In Part 3, Cassirer turns to an epistemo-critical analysis of the significative function (*Bedeutungsfunktion*) and the construction of scientific cognition (*wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis*). At this point, the "problem of truth" marks a critical turn on the "natural world concept" that has been the focus of Cassirer's study thus far. Cassirer takes up Richard Avenarius' concept of the "natural world concept" which refers to the pre-scientific immediate experience of the world that was the basis on which a scientific world-comprehension was to be constructed. In the third nexus, we see that signification (*Bedeutung*) designates the law (*Gesetz*) that is operative in the *dargestellt* of a lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) and determines the standard of the internal organization of its presentation (*Darstellung*).

Signification (*Bedeutung*) designates the law (*Gesetz*) that is operative in the *dargestellt* of a lived-experience (*Erlebnis*) and determines the standard of the internal organization of its presentation (*Darstellung*) as a sensible *Gestalt* of intuition. Strictly speaking, there is a mode of mythical signification as there is a mode of linguistics aesthetic, religious, and scientific signification: "All language, for example, is as such 'representation' (*Repräsentation*); is presentation (*Darstellung*) of a determinate 'signification' (*Bedeutung*) through a sensible 'sign.'"

Working with the tradition of German Idealism, Cassirer links a number of concepts together through a play on the roots of the German words, which is impossible to capture in English: each mode of configuration (*Gestaltung*) is an arranging into order (*Zuordnung*) that sets out and establishes a positing (*Setzung*) of elements that determines the position (*Stellen*) of

each element; each position (*Stellen*) that is posited (*gesetzt*) expresses the law (*Gesetz*) that has set it there (*dargestellt*). It is often thought that signification for Cassirer refers only to scientific knowledge. Although Cassirer often seeks to reserve the terms "signification" for scientific cognition, we should, strictly speaking, speak of "pure signification" (*reine Bedeutung*) as he does in 1927 in "The Problem of the Symbol and Its Place in the System of Philosophy." In pure signification, the sign is separated from the sphere of expression and presentation. It is suspended, as it were, in the free ether of pure thought. The signs of pure signification neither express nor present: all anthropomorphic expression and sensible intuition have been negated. It constructs a "view from nowhere." Although Cassirer appreciates Frege's and Russel's attempts to ground mathematics in logic, they remained embroiled in the traditional concept of abstraction. For this reason, when Cassirer enters into the debate concerning the foundations of mathematics, he gravitates toward Dedekind's mathematical structuralism and sees it as akin to his own theory of symbolic functional cognition. In the final chapter, Cassirer turns to how mathematics forms the bases of the natural-scientific cognition of the world, how the factual manifold of intuition takes on "physical sense and value only in that we "picture" [*abbilden*: to map] it in the realm of number."

An intimate reciprocal relationship exists for Cassirer between science and philosophy and their creative role in the cultural process as a whole. Philosophy and science have different roles but must engage and challenge each other. At one point, Cassirer will challenge and critique scientific projects; at other times, more often than not, he will take his lead from them. Only in this critical tension is the truly intellectual cosmos constructed. The history of science and philosophy is not a history of errors for Cassirer but rather a history of discovery, of the creativity of new modes of seeing and being. Cassirer never claims to be a holder of the truth, but only one thinker working in a community of thinkers in the endless project of enlightenment.

ENDNOTES

1 Ernst Cassirer, *Ernst Cassirer Naschlas*, vol. 1, 263.

2 "*Sicht*" appears in the introduction to volume one ("Sicht" der Idee, cf. 45) and again in a non-technical sense in chap. 3, cf. 150. It does not appear at all in volume 2. By contrast, it appears thirdty-five times in volume 3 and often in scare quotes.

3 Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, 20.

4 The term "*Glied*" can be translated as "limb," "member," "link," or "part." Cassirer employs the term throughout his analysis of the different modes of organization that are produced by the symbolic function. Every unitary organizational whole (*Gliederung*) comprises a series of interconnected *Gleder*: the lived body (limbs); the community (members); natural processes (links); scientific concepts (parts).

5 This first appears in *Language and Myth* (1925) in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), cf. 259. It next appears in 1927, in "The Problem of the Symbol and its Place in the System of Philosophy," in *The Warburg Years (1919–1933). Essays on Language, Art, Myth, and Technology*, trans. S. G. Lofts with A. Calcagno (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), cf. 262. It is used in the Preface to volume 1 in the context of aesthetics, cf. lxxviii. It does not appear at all in volume 2, on myth.

6 *Darstellungsfunktion* was first used in a technical sense in "The Problem of the Symbol and its Place in the System of Philosophy," (1927), cf. 261. The word is found only once in volume 1, on language, and then in a footnote (cf. 130 n. 25), and it appears only twice in volume 2, on myth (cf. 50 and 98).

7 Although Cassirer speaks of the problem of *Bedeutung* in the Introduction to volume 1, the term "*Bedeutungsfunktion*" is only used once and then in a non-technical sense, cf. 134. It first appears in *Language and Myth* (1925), cf. 259.

8 Cassirer, "The Problem of the Symbol and its Place in the System of Philosophy," (1927), 263.

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Steve G. Lofts

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Preface

vii The third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* returns to the investigations with which I began my work in systematic philosophy more than two decades ago. Its central concern is again the problem of cognition, the construction and organization of the "theoretical worldview." The question of the basic form of cognition is, however, now posited in a broader and more general sense. The investigations of my book *Substance and Function* (1910) started out from the assumption that the basic constitution of cognition and its constitutive law can most clearly and sharply be demonstrated where cognition has reached its highest level of its "necessity" and "universality." This law was, therefore, sought in the domain of mathematics and the mathematical sciences of nature, in the grounding of mathematical-physical "objectivity." Accordingly, the form of cognition as determined there coincided essentially with the form of exact *science*. In its content as well as in a methodological sense, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has, however, gone beyond this initial framing of the problem. It has expanded the basic concept of "*theory*" by striving to show that there are real theoretical elements and motives of form that prevail not only in the configuration of the scientific worldview but already in the configuration of the "natural worldview," in the configuration of the worldview of perception and intuition. And finally, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* has, in the end, driven further beyond this boundary of the "natural" worldview, the

worldview of experience and observation, in that it disclosed an interconnection in the mythical world that, though not reducible to the laws of empirical thinking, was by no means without its laws but that exhibited a structural form with a distinctive and independent imprint.

The third volume of this work now seeks to draw the systematic consequence from the results obtained in volumes 1 and 2. What it strives to make visible is the newly acquired concept of "theory" in its whole scope and in the wealth of possible configurations that are harbored in it. It strives to show how those other spiritual strata that the analysis of language and myth has uncovered spread under [*unterbreitet*] and viii
support [*unterbaut*] the stratum of conceptual, "discursive" cognition, and in the constant view to and review of this substructure [*Unterbau*], we shall attempt to determine the particular nature, organization, and architectonics of the "superstructure" of science. Thus, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* draws once again the worldview of exact cognition into its problem sphere – however, it now approaches it in a different way and accordingly sees it in a modified perspective. Instead of considering its consistent existence [*Bestand*], *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* now seeks to apprehend it in its necessary intellectual mediations. Starting from the relative "end" that thought has achieved here, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* inquires back into the middle and the beginnings, to understand the end for what it is and what it signifies.

I have discussed the general perspectives in which the framing of the problem stands in some detail in the Introduction – here it remains for me to give a brief explanation and justification of the title I have chosen for the investigations of this volume. When I speak of a "phenomenology of cognition," I do so not in its contemporary usage but am going back to the basic significance of "phenomenology" as it was established and systematically grounded and justified by Hegel. For Hegel, phenomenology was the basic prerequisite of philosophical cognition because he insisted that philosophical cognition must encompass the totality of spiritual forms and because according to him this totality can be made visible only in the transitions from one form to another. The truth [*Wahrheit*] is the "whole" – this whole, however, cannot be given all at once but instead must be unfolded progressively by thought in its own independent

movement and rhythm. This unfolding constitutes the being and the essence of science. The element [*Element*] of thought, in which science is and lives, thus receives its fulfillment and transparency only through the movement of its becoming:

> Science on its part requires that self-consciousness being [*Selbstbewußtseyn*] should have raised itself into this Aether in order to be able to live – and [actually] to live – with Science and in Science. Conversely, the individual has the right to demand that Science should at least provide him with the ladder to this standpoint, should show him this standpoint within himself. His right is based on his absolute independence, which he is conscious of possessing in every shape [*Gestalt*] of his knowledge; for in each one, whether recognized by Science [*Wissenschaft*] or not, and whatever the content may be, the individual is the absolute form, i.e. he is the *immediate certainty* [*Gewißheit*] of himself and, if this expression be preferred, he is therefore unconditioned being.[1]

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It would be impossible to state more sharply that the end, the *telos* of spirit, cannot be apprehended and expressed if it is taken as something existing for itself [*für sich*], as something detached and separated from its beginning and middle. Philosophical reflection does not in this way set off the end against the middle and the beginning but takes all three as integral moments in a unitary whole movement. In this basic principle of contemplation, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* agrees with the Hegelian approach – however much it must follow another approach in its grounding [*Begründung*] and its implementation. It also aspires to provide the individual with "the ladder" that will lead the individual from the primary configurations as they are found in the world of "immediate" consciousness to the world of "pure cognition." *Sub specie* of philosophical contemplation, every single rung of the ladder is indispensable; every single one can and must be considered, assessed, "known" if we wish to understand cognition not so much in terms of its result, its mere product, but in terms of its pure process character, in the mode and form of the "procedure" itself.

As for the specific details of the implementation of the theme, the third section of this volume, which deals with the construction of the

world of mathematical-physical objects, begins from the findings of earlier analyses. I have adhered throughout to the principle that guided and determined these analyses, the idea of the epistemo-critical "primacy" of the concept of law over the concept of thing; however, it is now necessary to establish, clarify, and prove this idea, to measure it by the vast intellectual development that mathematics and the exact natural sciences have undergone in the last two decades. It needs to be shown how, through all the radical transformations that the content [*Gehalt*] and shape of exact science have undergone, in a purely contentual [*inhaltlich*] respect, the purely methodological continuity has not been interrupted or abandoned – rather, precisely these contentual [*inhaltlich*] reconfigurations have reconfirmed and shed a bright light on its continuity.

Whereas in the exposition of these facts, I was able to reach back to earlier investigations and draw from them,[2] the first two sections of this x
volume begin with a more difficult task. Here we could not proceed within the framework [*Rahmen*] previously designated and marked off but had to acquire and delimit the domain treated in these first two sections. Admittedly, these sections, which are concerned essentially with the basic forms of *expressive perception* [*Ausdruckswahrnehmung*] and *thing perception* [*Dingwahrnehmung*], have to do with well-known problems – problems that have always been posed by psychology as well by a critique of cognition, by phenomenology as well as by metaphysics. All these questions acquire, however, a new shaped and an altered significance as soon as we see them in the context they receive from their relation to the basic systematic question of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. For these questions, their own manner of synopsis [*Zusammenschau*] by which their whole intellectual "orientation" is altered here. So that this spiritual "synopsis" could emerge more clearly, the attempt had to be undertaken to survey the *material* presented by phenomenology, psychology, and finally the pathology of perception, in all its diversity and concrete fullness, while at the same time making visible in this material a new *problematic*. It was evident to me that this attempt could signify no more than a first beginning and starting point; if I undertook it, it was in the hope that my effort would be taken up and carried further by philosophical research as well as individual research.

As in my earlier works, I have not only attempted to avoid any cleavage between systematic and historical considerations but have

striven for a close fusion between the two. Only in such a reciprocal relation of this sort can the two promote and throw light on each other. Nevertheless, without exceeding the framework [*Rahmen*] of this book, I could not strive for anything resembling "completeness" in the purely historical [*historisch*] discussions. I have taken up the threads of this discussion and again dropped them accordingly where it seemed necessary to the factual [*sachlich*] clarification and elucidation of certain basic systematic problems. I have proceeded in the same way with regard to modern philosophy. Although I have not
xi avoided critical debates [*Auseinandersetzungen*] with modern philosophy where this seemed fitting to clarify and deepen my own framing of the problem, such debates [*Auseinandersetzungen*] have not been allowed to become an end in themselves.

In the original plan of this book, a final section was envisaged in which the relationship between the basic ideas of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* and the total labor [*Gesamtarbeit*] of contemporary philosophy would have been established and justified. If in the end I had to forgo this section, it was only to avoid making the present volume even longer than it is and to avoid burdening it with discussions that, in the final analysis, lie outside the ambit prescribed by its substantive [*sachlich*] problem. Nevertheless, I do not mean to renounce this discussion as such, since the custom, which has once more become popular, of throwing one's own thoughts out into empty space as it were, without inquiring as to their relation and connection to the total labor [*Gesamtarbeit*] of systematic philosophy, has never appeared to me to be beneficial or fruitful. Thus, the critical part that should have concluded this volume will be reserved for a future publication that I hope soon to bring out under the title "'Life' and 'Spirit' – Toward a Critique of Contemporary Philosophy."

With regard to the philosophical and scientific *literature* referred to by this presentation, the manuscript of this volume had already been completed at the end of 1927; the publication was delayed only because at that time I still planned to include the final, "critical" chapter. Consequently, I have been able to take into account only a few of the works published in the last two years.

Hamburg, July 1929
Ernst Cassirer

ENDNOTES

1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Preface, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, xxx.

2 Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function, and Einstein's Theory of Relativity* (New York: Dover, 1953).

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE MATTER [*MATERIE*] AND FORM OF COGNITION

When we designate language, myth, and art as "symbolic forms," 1
there seems to lie in this expression the presupposition that they all, as determinate spiritual modes of configuration, go back to an ultimate, originary-stratum of the actual that is beheld in them only as through a foreign medium. Reality does not seem to be comprehensible for us in any other way than in the particular nature of these forms; however, it implies, at the same time that reality is veiled by them as much as it is revealed by them. The same basic functions that give the world of spirit its determinacy, its imprint, its character, appear on the other hand to be only so many refractions that an intrinsically unitary and unique being undergoes as soon as it is grasped and appropriated [*aneignen*] by a "subject." Seen from this point of view, the philosophy of symbolic forms is nothing other than an attempt to assign to each one, as it were, its own specific and distinctive index of refraction. It aspires to know the particular nature of the various refracting media, to understand each one according to its constitution and the laws of its structure. However, although it consciously proceeds into this intermediary realm, into this realm of mere mediacy, philosophy as a whole, as a doctrine of the totality of being, seems unable to remain in it. Rather, the basic drive

of knowledge repeatedly makes itself felt here: the drive to unveil the veiled image of Sais and to see the naked, unclad truth. Before the philosophical gaze, which wants to apprehend the world as an absolute unity, every manifold in general, particularly the manifold of symbols, must ultimately be dissolved: ultimate reality, the reality of "being" in itself, should become visible.

The metaphysics of every age has stood before this basic problem. It posits being as uniform and simple, because and insofar as *truth* can be thought of only as unitary and simple. In this sense, the *ἕν τὸ σοφόν* [wisdom is one thing] of Heraclitus became the maxim of philosophy: it was like a reminder and wake-up call to seek the one, unbroken light of pure cognition behind the colorful splendor of the senses, behind the manifold and diversity of thought-forms. As Spinoza said, it belongs to the nature [*Wesen*] of light that it illuminates itself and the darkness – thus, it must at some point give an immediate self-attestation of truth and reality. For thought and reality must not merely "correspond" to each other in some way but rather permeate each other. The function of thinking should not be to "express" being, i.e. to apprehend and designate *sub specie* its own sense-bestowing categories. Rather, thinking feels itself equal to reality: it bears within itself the conviction and belief that it is able to exhaust its content [*Gehalt*]. There can be no final unsublatable barrier here, because thinking and the object toward which it is directed are *one*.

Parmenides was the first to articulate this principle [*Satz*] in classical pregnance and sharpness and so became the founder of all philosophical "rationalism." The claim made here, however, is by no means limited to the circle of rationalism. The identity of the "subject" and the "object," the merging of the one into the other, was still regarded as the actual *goal* of cognition, even after the view of the *means* by which this goal was to be attained had completely changed. Although the basic view of the means had indeed changed, it had in no way undergone a fundamental transformation if it was now the force of sensible perception, rather than pure thinking, that was entrusted and credited with the task of laying a bridge from one realm to the other. The focal point now seemed to have shifted from one specific theoretical point of view to another – it had moved over from the side of the "concept" to that of "perception"; however, for perception, the same methodological presupposition and requirement

remained in force. The concept as such – it now seemed – could never break through to reality by means of its own force: it remains entangled in its own formations and creations, its own denominations and significations. Sensation is, however, not merely significative or symbolic, it is no mere "sign" of being; rather, it gives and contains reality in its immediate fullness. For, if cognition is not to be confined forever within its own circle, at some point [*Stelle*], a direct contact must occur between knowledge and reality.

Thus, for Berkeley, Parmenides' principle of the identity of thinking and being is replaced by a fundamental epistemological and metaphysical equation: *esse* = *percipi*. With this, although the contentual sense of the equation is, it would seem, inverted into its opposite – its pure form remained purely as such, unaltered and untouched. For here, the 3
requirement to lay bare an originary-stratum of reality, in which reality may become apprehensible as free from all symbolic interpretation and signification, remains valid. If we succeed in freeing ourselves from all these interpretations – if, above all, we succeed in removing the shroud of *words*, which veils the true essential being of things – then we are all of a sudden face to face with the originary-perceptions that contain the certainties of cognition. In this sphere, there is no place for the opposition between truth and error, reality and semblance. For the simple existence of sense impressions remains free from all possible deception. A sensible impression may exist or not exist; it can be given or not given; however, it cannot be "true" or "false." We enter into the domain of this opposition only when another, mediated, relationship is interpolated into the immediate presence of the impression, when a representative [*repräsentativ*] determination is attributed to the "presentation," to the direct "having" of a sensation. Where a content of consciousness stands not only for itself but for another content, where it attempts to "represent" [*vertreten*] a content that is not immediately presenting itself [*gegenwärtigen*], there and only there do we find that reciprocal relationship between the parts [*Gliede*] of the whole of consciousness that by its further mediated consequences can cause one part [*Glied*] to be mistakenly taken for the other and "confused" with this other.

This phenomenon does not, therefore, belong to the circle of mere sensation but to that of *judgment*. And of course, judgment – even in the simplest *form* in which it seems to content itself with merely affirming

and reinforcing a sensible given – distinguishes itself from sensation precisely by the fact that it no longer moves in the realm of simple existence but in the realm of *signs*. The moment [*Augenblick*] that we entrust ourselves to it, we are back under the spell of that "abstract" thinking that operates with the symbols that stand in for things rather than with things themselves. The further the "science" of nature progresses, the more it loses itself in the maze of these symbols: thus, according to Berkeley the basic task of all true philosophical self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*] is to dispel this illusion. Philosophy achieves what mere science, inseparably bound up as it is with the medium of language and the vehicle of linguistic concepts, can never achieve: it places before us the world of pure experience in its immediate existence [*Dasein*] and its being-a-certain-way [*Sosein*], free from all blending with foreign components and from all darkening and blurring by any arbitrary significative ingredients.

4 On *this* point, then, the whole history of philosophy, regardless of all the internal systematic oppositions and undeterred by all the disputes between schools, seems to go in the same direction. Philosophy first constituted itself in this act of self-affirmation – in the confidence that it takes itself as the proper organ for the cognition of reality. The assertion of the *adaequatio rei et intellectus* [correspondence of a thing to the intellect] remains in this sense its natural point of departure. On the other hand, this basic act contains within itself, of course, its own dialectical opposite. The more sharply philosophy seeks to determine its object, the more the object, through this determination, becomes a problem for it. When philosophy sets up its own goal and consciously formulates it, there likewise arises within philosophy itself, through the immanent necessity of its own method, the question of its own attainability, of its inner "possibility." Thus, the positive answer given by rationalism as well as sensationalism to the problem of the cognition of reality is followed by skepticism as its shadow. The identity [*Identität*] asserted between knowledge as such and its objective content is abandoned, and in its place emerges instead a difference [*Differenz*] that becomes progressively sharper, that is intensified into a polar tension. Even the "equating" [*Gleichung*] of cognition – regardless of whether it is comprehended in a rationalist or sensationalist sense – does not sublate this difference [*Differenz*]: an equation [*Gleichheit*] is – according to a definition introduced

by Balzano into the logic of mathematics – nothing other than a special case of *dissimilarity* [*Verschiedenheit*]. The connection, the synthesis, that is asserted and expressed by the equal sign, does not make the difference [*Unterschied*] of the members [*Glieder*] standing on either side of it disappear but rather confirms this difference [*Unterschied*]. In this respect, the approach of the equating [*Gleichung*] of cognition already contains within it a germ of destruction that skepticism need only unfold and bring to fruition. The more the self-consciousness of cognition is strengthened – the more clearly it can see through itself and the more clearly it *knows* its form – the more its own form appears as the necessary boundary that it is never able to exceed [*überschreiten*]. The absolute object that cognition initially believed it was able to capture and assimilate in this form recedes more and more into an unattainable distance – instead of apprehending the object, it seems that cognition is permitted to consider only itself, in all its contingency and relativity, as if beheld in a mirror.

It was the revolution in the way of thinking that takes place in Kant's framing of the question that first promised a way out of this dilemma. Leery of the dogmatism that teaches us nothing and of the skepticism that promises us nothing, Kant raised the following basic critical question: "Is metaphysics at all possible?"[1] Cognition was now saved from the danger of skeptical disintegration; however, this salvation and liberation proved to be possible only through a shift in the aim of cognition. Instead of a *static* relationship between cognition and the object – as it can be designated by the geometrical expression of a congruence, the "coincidence" between the two – a *dynamic* relationship between both was now to be sought and established. No longer does cognition, whether as a whole or as a determinate part of itself, reach "over" into the transcendent world of objects – nor is the transcendent world of objects able to "migrate" into cognition. All these spatial images are now recognized *as* images. Knowledge is described neither as a part of being nor as its picturing [*Abbildung*]. On the other hand, the *relation* to this being is by no means taken away from it but rather grounded in a new viewpoint [*Gesichtspunkt*]. For it is now the *function* of knowledge that is to construct and constitute the object, not as an absolute object but as the object conditioned by this function, as the "object in appearance." What we call "objective" being, what we call the object of experience, is possible only under the precondition of the understanding and its *a priori*

functions of unity: "Thereupon we say: we cognize the object when we have effectuated a synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition." To understand this performance as a whole and in its detailed conditions now becomes the basic task of the "analytic of the understanding." It seeks to show how the various basic forms of cognition, sense sensation, and pure intuition, the categories of the pure understanding and the ideas of pure reason, intermesh – and how by their reciprocal relation and determination they determine the theoretical shape [*Gestalt*] of
6 reality. This determination is not taken over from the object but involves an act of "spontaneity" of the understanding itself. It is a specific mode and tendency of *forming* [*Formung*] that leads to the worldview of theoretical cognition. Consequently, this does not appear in its basic features as "given," as a finished product, that is imposed on us by the nature of things, but as a result of a free forming [*Bilden*], which, nevertheless, is never arbitrary but always thoroughly lawful. How it is *possible* to reconcile freedom and necessity, the purely immanent self-determination of thinking with objective validity? This question forms the problem of the entire Kantian critique of reason.

From this comprehensive framing of the question, we single out that element that directly touches on the basic question that the philosophy of symbolic forms sets for itself. Whereas precritical metaphysics believed it had found an ultimate *answer*, Kant discovered a new and perhaps the most difficult *task* for all philosophical cognition. For him, what was at stake was not only to *carry out* theoretical sense-bestowing, as it exhibits itself in science and in philosophy, but also to *comprehend* [*begreifen*] it for what it is. As long as we consider this sense-bestowing simply in terms of its output, as long as we conflate it with its result, it seems in a certain sense to keep vanishing with this result. Therefore, instead of concentrating on the result of theoretical cognition, we should look back to its function and its distinctive lawfulness. It is alone the key that can unlock [*aufschließen*] the "truth of things." From now on, contemplation is directed no longer exclusively toward what is disclosed [*Erschlossen*] but now also toward the act, the mode and manner, of the disclosing [*Erschließen*]. The key that is intended to open the gates of cognition should, at the same time, be understood in terms of its structure [*Bau*]: theoretical cognition should be understood in terms of its "structure of signification." There is no longer a road that leads back to

that relationship of "immediate" coincidence [*Deckung*] and correspondence between cognition and its object that was assumed by dogmatism. Rather, the critical justification and grounding of cognition now stems from its knowing itself to be a mediated and mediating spiritual organ, which has its specific place [*Stelle*] within the construction of the whole world of spirit and carries out its specific performance [*Leistung*].

Such a turning back of cognition onto itself certainly seems to be possible only once it has traversed its whole course and has arrived at its highest point. Only "transcendental philosophy" is capable of such a turning back [*Umkehr*]: it alone is concerned not so much with objects as with our mode of cognizing objects in general, insofar as such cognition is held to be possible *a priori*. It alone strives to be not so much a knowledge of certain objects [*Objekte*] but rather a "knowledge of knowledge" [*Wissen von Wissen*]. These claims immediately explain why Kant, while he raises his central problem to the heights of "transcendental" contemplation, strives constantly to stay within it. Where he inquiries into the "form" of theoretical cognition, he believes that he can adequately apprehend it and set it before us in a clear and sharp outline only by keeping in view the actual *telos* of cognition, its end and fulfillment. Only toward this end can the logical structure of knowledge as such emerge in its necessity and purity, unmingled with contingent determinations. It must appear as a degeneration of this arduously achieved *level* of the philosophical framing of the question, whenever the distinctive sense of the theoretical "logos" is sought in a place [*Stelle*] other than where it emerges in its characteristic perfection, in its proper determinacy and exactitude. Such exactitude, such pure and complete self-realization of the theoretical form, however, is according to Kant reserved for mathematics and the mathematical sciences of nature.

The question must therefore be directed primarily to them – and it must always remain oriented by reference to them. Thus, no empirical datum can partake of the form of cognition unless it has already passed through the medium of mathematical concept formation, unless it has been determined by the pure intuitions of space and time and by the concepts of number and of extensive or intensive magnitude; unless it has passed through this medium, it remains simply matter [*Stoff*], mere matter [*Materie*]. The problem of whether this matter of sense sensation should perhaps not as such be designated only *relatively*, whether it does

not reveal a certain configuration in itself and conceal its own "more concrete" formings [*Formungen*], is not posited – at least not at the *beginning* of Kant's critical investigation. Sensation appears here as the absolutely "given." The only question is, how does this given *fit* into the *a priori* forms of sensibility and the understanding, without which these forms in their significance and validity arise from it and are based on it?

If we inquire into the "origin" of sensation itself, at first, we receive an enigmatic answer. For this origin – so it would appear – can be comprehended in no other way than by thrusting it back into the realm of the unrecognizable, to explain it as an "affection" of the mind by "things in themselves." The insoluble dialectical difficulties in which this explanation entangles us soon came to light in the history of Kantian philosophy and its further development by his successors.[2] These difficulties become comprehensible when we recall that at this point Kant was concerned not so much with solving a problem as with doing away with it. From a purely historical point of view, this 'doing away with' seems understandable, even necessary: for only in this way could the road be cleared for Kant's most positive achievement. Once this road had been fought for, however, theoretical self-reflection must of course return to its starting point and turn its attention to the problem inherent in the dualistic opposition of "mere" matter [*Stoff*] and "pure" form.

It is by no means just in the post-Kantian systems that this progression of thought can be shown and pursued; rather, in large measure, it already determined the inner development of Kant's own theory. We do not have to advance to the appearance of *The Critique of Judgment* to become aware of this distinctive movement of Kant's thinking – we can sense how this thinking keeps circling round the dualism of matter and form set forth in its beginnings and how it gradually alters and deepens the *sense* of this opposition. For the critical theory of cognition, the "matter [*Materie*] of sensation" seems at first to signify nothing more than something absolutely present [*schlechthin Vorhanden*] – a solid substrate that the formative forces of spirit attack but whose essential being cannot be altered or penetrated. It remains the unpenetrated and impenetrable residue of cognition. The analytic of the pure understanding, however, already goes one step further. For it takes up not only the problem of the "objective" deduction of the categories but also the problem of their "subjective" deduction, and the two directions of the question complement

and reciprocally require each other. If the objective deduction is directed essentially toward the form of cognition of objects as it exists in the mathematical sciences of nature, if it is aimed at those principles through which the mere "rhapsody" of perceptions becomes a tightly enclosed unity, a system of experiential cognition, then the subjective deduction, on the other hand, immerses itself in the conditions and particular nature of *conscious perception*.

And it comes to the conclusion that what we commonly call the world of perception, far from being a mere formless mass of impressions, already includes within itself certain basic and originary-forms of "synthesis." Without this, without the synthesis of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition, we should have neither a perceiving nor a thinking I – there would be an "object" neither of pure thought nor of empirical perception. At the beginning of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, sensibility and understanding are distinguished as the two stems of human cognition that may have sprung from a common root that is unknown to us. Thus, the opposition between the two, and their eventual communion, seemingly continued to be understood here in a realistic sense: sensibility and understanding belong to different *strata* of existence, although both may be rooted together in a more originary-stratum of all being that precedes all empirical separation but that we cannot grasp or determine more closely.

The analytic of the pure understanding, however, grasps the relationship from an entirely different point of view, shifting the point of the union as well as the separation of sensibility and understanding to a wholly other place. For the unity between the two is no longer sought in an unknown ground of things; rather, it is, as it were, sought in the heart of cognition itself. If this unity is at all discoverable, it must be grounded not so much in the nature [*Wesen*] of absolute being as in an originary-function of theoretical knowing, and it is through this function that it must be intelligible. Kant designated this originary-function as the function of the "synthetic unity of apperception"; it became the supreme point to which every use of the understanding, even all logic and with it transcendental philosophy, must relate. And this "supreme point," this focus of spiritual activity, is one and the same for all the "faculties" of spirit: hence, it is the same for the "understanding" as it is for "sensibility." The "I think," the expression of pure apperception, must be able

to accompany *all* my representations: "otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or at least would be nothing for me."[3]

Thus, a general condition is set up here that is valid equally to sensible representations as to purely intellectual ones. In the transcendental
10 apperception is found a "radical faculty of all our cognition" to which both can equally be related and in which they are indissolubly linked. With this, it follows that there cannot be anything like an isolated, "merely sensible" consciousness – that is to say, a consciousness that remains outside of any determination by the theoretical *functions of signification* and that precedes them as an independent datum. The transcendental unity of apperception is by no means related exclusively to the logic of scientific thinking and limited to it. It is not only the condition for this thinking and for the positing and determination of its object but also the condition "of every possible perception." If perception itself is to "signify" something at all, if it is to be perception *for* an I and the perception *of* something, then it must share in certain theoretical characteristics of validity. And from now on, it appears to be one of the specific tasks of the critique of cognition to uncover and demonstrate those characteristics that make up the form of conscious perception *as such*. The schematic opposition between a "judgment of perception" and a "judgment of experience," as retained in the *Prolegomena* – albeit more for the sake of presentation than for the sake of systematics – has thus in principle been overcome. For the unification [*Vereinigung*] of sensible perceptions or representations in *one* consciousness and their relation to *one* object are never a matter of mere sensible receptivity but are always based on an "act of spontaneity." And it now becomes evident that just as there is a spontaneity of the pure understanding, of logical-scientific thinking and constructing, so too is there a spontaneity of the pure imagination. The imagination is also by no means solely reproductive but also originally productive. Now an uninterrupted path leads from the mere "affection" of the senses, with which the critique of reason begins, to the forms of pure intuition – and from these in turn to the productive imagination and the unity of action expressed in the judgment of the pure understanding. Sensibility, intuition, and understanding in no way form merely successive *phases* of cognition to be grasped in their simple

succession but rather show themselves to be a tight interpenetration, to be its constitutive *elements*.

And only now is the relationship between the matter [*Materie*] and the "form" of cognition brought to expression that corresponds to Kant's new basic insight, to his "Copernican revolution." For both are now no 11
longer absolute *potencies of being* but serve rather for the designation of certain *differences of signification* and for the *structures of signification*. The "matter" [*Stoff*] of sensation, as it was grasped by Kant in the beginning, could still be interpreted as a kind of epistemological counterpart to the Aristotelian *πρώτη ὕλη* [primal matter]. Like this *prima materia*, it was taken as the absolute indeterminate *before* all determination – like it, Kant's "matter" [*Stoff*] had to await all determination by form that is joined to it and imprinted on it. On the other hand, the situation changed entirely after Kant had fully developed the idea of his "transcendental topics" and after, within this topic, he had fully defined the opposition between "matter" [*Stoff*] and "form." For both of them have now ceased to be originary-determinations of being, ontological essential beings, and have become pure *concepts of reflection*, which in the section on the "amphiboly of the concepts of reflection" are treated along the same lines as are agreement and opposition, "one-and-the-sameness" [*Einerleiheit*] and dissimilarity [*Verschiedenheit*]. They are no longer two poles of being that confront each other in an unsublatable real opposition; they are, rather, parts [*Glieder*] of a methodological opposition that is likewise a methodological correlation.

As a result, it is now no longer contradictory but actually necessary that what from one point of view may be designated as the matter [*Materie*] of cognition is in another respect recognized as something *formed*, or at very least form-containing. The consequence of the methodological relativization of the opposition is that the significance of both opposing parts [*Gegenglieder*] changes according to the underlying spiritual system of reference [*Bezugssystem*]. Applied to the problem of perception, this means that where we are concerned with distinguishing the world in which prescientific consciousness limits itself [*sich halten*] from the constructive determinations of scientific cognition, we may look on perception as something relatively simple and "immediate." In reference to these constructive determinations, it may appear as a simple datum, as something "pre-given" [*Vorgeben*]. This, however, by no means deprives us of the

possibility, or relieves us of the obligation, of recognizing it in another problem context as something thoroughly mediated and conditioned. This only proves that the analysis of the theoretical "form" of cognition cannot persist in a single stratum of cognition and commit itself, as it were, to this stratum but instead must always consider the totality of the elements from which cognition is constructed. For not only the region of
12 scientific, "abstract" concepts but even that of "common" experience is penetrated with theoretical interpretations and significations. And when the transcendental critique seeks to uncover the structure [*Struktur*] of cognition of objects, it may not limit itself to the intellectual "sublimation" of experience, to the superstructure [*Oberbau*] of theoretical science, but rather, it must also learn to understand the substructure [*Unterbau*], the world of "sensible" perceptions, as a specifically determined and organized framework [*Gefüge*], as a spiritual cosmos *sui generis*.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as we have seen, this requirement is in no way closed off; however, this work did not explore in all directions the complex of problems that it had so clearly *designated* based on its own presuppositions. For its basic methodological task pointed it in another direction from the start. The "subjective" deduction is here subordinated to the "objective" deduction: the analysis of conscious perception serves only as a preparation and at the same time as a counterpart and corollary to the following truly decisive question: the presuppositions and principles on which experience *as science* is based. Experience as science is possible only through a necessary connection of perceptions. The problem must therefore be primarily directed toward this necessary connection and its possibility. The structure of sense, without which perception cannot be thought, is therefore thought essentially as a lawful structure: it implies that the individual perceptions are not isolated, that they may not form a mere aggregate, but that they must be gathered together into an intellectual framework [*Gefüge*], a "context of experience." "That which is *interconnected* with the material conditions of experience (of sensation)" – so Kant formulates the second of the postulates of empirical thinking in general – "is *actual*."[4] This interconnection, however, is created and its particular nature and its formal character are determined by the general laws of the understanding, of which all particular laws of nature are merely specifications. Accordingly, one and the same purely intellectual synthesis conditions and renders possible,

according to Kant, the object [*Gegenstand*] of empirical intuition as well as the object [*Objekte*] of the mathematical science of nature. And it is precisely this one-and-the-sameness [*Einerleiheit*] that provides for the first time a solution to the basic epistemo-critical question as to the *applicability* of pure mathematical concepts to sensible appearances. The same action, which gives unity to the various representations in 13
a logical judgment, also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition, which is, generally expressed, called the pure concept of the understanding.

The categories on which the system of mathematical and physical cognition is founded are accordingly the same as those on which our "natural world concept" rests. It would thus seem that no difference [*Differenz*], let alone a fundamental cleavage, may be recognized here: in this case, the entire demonstration on which the transcendental deduction of the categories is based would appear to be uprooted – it would no longer be possible to answer the question of the *quid juris* of the categories, the question of their right to be applied to empirical-sensible appearances. This right is grounded in the supposition that all synthesis – even the synthesis that first makes perception as objective perception, as the perception of "something," possible – is subordinated to the pure concepts of the understanding:

> Thus if, e.g., I make the empirical intuition of a house into perception through the apprehension of its manifold, my ground is the *necessary unity of space* and of outer sensible intuition in general, and I, as it were, draw its shape [*Gestalt*] in agreement with this synthetic unity of the manifold in space. This very same synthetic unity, however, if I abstract from the form of space, has its seat in the understanding, and is the category of the synthesis of the homogeneous in an intuition in general, i.e., the category of *quantity*, with which the synthesis of apprehension, i.e., the perception, must therefore be in thoroughgoing agreement.[5]

And in the same sense, even the pure "what" of sensation, its simple quality, is determined according to the understanding and hence in a certain respect is anticipatable, because the principle of continuity, the principle of intensive quantity, subjects the *alteration* in this quality to a

definite condition and prescribes a certain form for it. In this way, it is established "that the synthesis of apprehension, which is empirical, must necessarily be in agreement with the synthesis of apperception, which is intellectual and contained in the category entirely *a priori*."[6]

> [T]his very same formative synthesis by means of which we construct a triangle in the imagination is entirely identical with that which we exercise in the apprehension of an appearance in order to make a concept of experience of it – it is this alone that connects with this concept the representation of the possibility of such a thing.[7]

Thus, the thought of an original intellectual "form" underlying the perceived world is strictly carried through by Kant in every direction; however, this form for him coincides essentially with the form of mathematical concepts. In any event, both are differentiated from each other not in terms of essence and structure but according to the clarity of expression [*Ausprägung*]. The conditions of the mathematical-physical concept of the object, the concepts of number and measure, exhaust the whole theoretical content [*Gehalt*] and theoretical significance of perception. It must always pass through these general mathematical determinations if it is to be fixed and formed for us in any way. The question of its "what" and its "how" can be answered with real rigor only if we can convert it into a question of "how much." For, everything that distinguishes one perception from another can be objectively and theoretically designated ultimately only through the giving of a position in a definite system of measurement or scale of magnitudes. Thus, the critical analysis of conscious perception and the analysis of the basic theoretical system of the exact sciences arrive at the same conclusion: we are everywhere brought back to the same originary-stratum of the intellect, of *a priori* concepts, as the fixed foundation.

As necessary and logically consistent as this result appears in the framework [*Rahmen*] of Kant's general framing of the question, we cannot remain within it once the framework [*Rahmen*] is broadened, once we have attempted to state the "transcendental question" in a more comprehensive sense. The philosophy of symbolic forms is not concerned exclusively or even primarily with the purely scientific, exact *world-comprehending* [*Weltbegreifen*] but rather with all the tendencies of

world-understanding [*Weltverstehen*]. It seeks to apprehend these tendencies of world-understanding in their diversity, in their totality, and in the inner differentiation of their manifestations. And it becomes apparent that the "understanding" [*Verstehen*] of the world is no mere taking up, no repetition of a given structure [*Gefüge*] of reality, but instead comprises a free activity of spirit. There is no true understanding of the world [*Weltverständnis*] that is not in this way based on certain basic tendencies, not so much of contemplation as of spiritual *forming* [*Formung*]. To apprehend the laws of this forming [*Formung*], we had above all to distinguish their 15
different dimensions sharply from each other. Certain concepts – such as those of number, time, and space – constitute, as it were, originary-forms of synthesis that are indispensable wherever a "multiplicity" is to be taken together into a "unity," wherever a manifold is to be divided and organized according to certain shapes [*Gestalten*].

As we have seen, however, this organization is not performed in the same way in all domains: rather, its mode depends essentially on the particular structural principle that is effective and dominant in each particular domain. Thus, in particular, language and myth each exhibit a particular "modality" that is specific to them and that in a sense lends a common tonality to all their individual formations [*Gebilde*].[8] If we hold fast to this insight into the "multidimensionality" of the spiritual world, then the question of the relationship between the "concept" and "intuition" immediately takes on an essentially more complex shape [*Gestalt*]. As long as we remain within the ambit of the purely epistemo-critical question examining only the presuppositions and validity of basic scientific concepts, the world of sensible intuition and sensible perception will also be determined only *with regard to* these same concepts and evaluated as a preliminary stage to them. It is the germ from which the theoretical formations [*Gebilde*] of science are expected to unfold – however, the configurations that will emerge from it later are unwittingly already incorporated into the description of this germ. The structure of what is perceived and intuited is seen from the outset *sub specie* of the *one* goal: scientific objectivization, the theoretical concept of the unity of "nature." So in the apparent "receptivity" of intuition, we find the spontaneity of the "understanding" – of precisely that understanding that, by virtue of its own lawfulness, is the condition for the pure cognition of nature, for the lawfulness of scientific experience and its object.

As essential as this tendency toward the systematization of "experience," toward the universal system of the cognition of nature, is for sensible intuition, it is, however, not the *only* meaning intention [*Bedeutungsintention*] that is contained in sensible intuition. For, the "forms of thought," into which the exact-scientific comprehension envelops the
16 world of phenomena, are confronted by forms of another imprint and another direction of sense. We found one such form of spiritual vision [*Schau*] effective in linguistic concepts as well as in mythical concepts. Measured by the concepts of rigorous science, linguistic concepts may appear to be mere preliminary concepts [*Vorbegriffe*], provisional formations, and the beginnings of thinking, while mythical concepts may simply appear as pseudo-concepts. This does not, however, prevent them from possessing a specific character and significance. They are also modes of spiritual "sight" [*Sicht*]; they also divide the flowing, constantly uniform succession of phenomena and let them join together into fixed shapes [*Gestalten*]. Language lives in a world of denominations, of phonetic symbols, with which it links a certain signification. And in that it holds fast to the unity and determinacy of these denominations, the manifold of sensible lived-experiences that it strives to grasp and signalize take on a relative stability and come to a kind of standstill. The *name* introduces the initial element of constance and duration into this manifold, and the identity of the name is the preliminary stage and the anticipation of the identity of the logical concept. The configuration takes place differently in the domain of myth: the "objective" world that is constructed here, which is glimpsed as something enduring and constant behind the infinite multiformity [*Vielgestalt*] of the phenomena of outward and inner perception, is a world of daemonic and divine forces, a pantheon of animated and active beings [*Wesen*].

In both cases, however, we find the same relationship that confronted us in the consideration and analysis of theoretical-scientific cognition. No more than scientific cognition could disclose "matter" and "form" as separable *components*, existing independently of each other and pieced together subsequently and from without, can we discern any such separation when we return to the originary-strata of language and myth. We never find "naked" sensation, as *materia nuda*, to which some form-bestowing is adjoined – rather, all that is graspable and accessible to us is the concrete determinacy, the living multiformity, of a perceived

world, which is dominated and permeated through and through by certain modes of forming [*Formung*]. The most careful and accurate analyses of that "primitive thinking" on which myth rests have repeatedly clarified with unmistakable sharpness the following *one* conclusion: a specific mode and tendency of *perception* corresponds to this mode of primitive *thinking*.

The mythical formations [*Gebilde*] do not resemble a colorful veil that merely obscures the empirical representation of things that nevertheless remain in force [*bestehenbleiben*] behind this veil as a solid, immutable core. On the contrary, what constitutes the force of these formations [*Gebilde*] is that in them their proper and distinctive mode of intuiting and perceiving "reality" is given, one subject to entirely different conditions from that mode of apprehending reality that leads to the phenomenon of "nature," as a whole, that stands under thoroughgoing empirical laws. Mythical perception knows nothing of *such* a "nature," although, it is by no means lacking in internal connections, in interconnections, in which the temporally and spatially separate appears as elements, as expressions and imprints of one and the same mythical "sense." Analogously, the same is valid of language – for here too, it is one-sided and inadequate if we pursue what language achieves solely in the direction of its influence on *thinking* instead of considering as equally essential and original its influence on the construction and configuration of the world of perception. It is not initially in the construction [*Fügung*] and organization of the conceptual world but in the phenomenal structure of perception itself that the force of linguistic forming [*Formung*] perhaps most clearly and strikingly proves itself. Humboldt defines language "genetically" as the eternally repeated work of spirit to make the articulated sound capable of expressing thought. On the other hand, however, he leaves no doubt that this work of thought is intimately interwoven with the work on the world of intuition and on that of representation. By the same spiritual act by which the human spins language out of itself, the human spins itself into language; so that in the end, the human communicates and lives with intuitive objects in no other manner than that shown by the medium of language.[9]

Once we have become thoroughly imbued with this basic insight, this gives rise to a world of more hidden and obscure problems of form that are in no way less significant for philosophy than those problems raised

by the construction of scientific cognition. Only by surveying the totality of these problems can we gain an insight into that immanent dynamic of
18 spirit that advances beyond all the fixed boundaries that we tend to draw between its various "faculties." In this dynamic, in the continuous movement of spirit, all seeing [*Sehen*], to speak with Goethe, passes directly into a considering, all considering into a musing [*Sinnen*], all musing [*Sinnen*] into a connecting, so that in every attentive glance into the world, we are theorizing. In the following considerations and investigations, it is a question of taking the concept of "*theory*" in the full breadth accorded it by these lines from the preface of Goethe's *Theory of Colors*. Theory cannot and must not be restricted to the scientific cognition of the world, let alone to a single, logically selected culminating point in it; rather, we must seek it wherever a specific mode of configuration, of elevation [*Erhebung*] to a determinate unity of "sense," is at work.

2. SYMBOLIC COGNITION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORLD OF OBJECTS

The particular nature of its concepts and the historical conditions of its development make it absolutely clear why philosophy should have been relatively late in drawing the totality of the problems of form involved in myth and language into the ambit of its consideration, that it should have for a long time avoided and even rejected these problems from its threshold. For the concept of philosophy attains its full force and purity only where the view of the world that is expressed in linguistic and mythical concepts is abandoned, where it is in principle overcome. The "logic of philosophy" first constitutes itself in this act of overcoming. To achieve its own maturity, philosophy requires the *confrontation* [*Auseinandersetzung*] with the linguistic and mythical worlds and the setting itself in dialectic *opposition* to both. Only in this way does philosophy succeed in the determination and assertion of its concepts of essence and truth. Even where, as in Plato, philosophy still makes use of myth as a form of expression and masters this form, it must stand outside and above this form: philosophy must distinguish sharply and unambiguously pure *logos* from myth. Myth remains attached to the world of becoming and hence to the world of semblances, whereas the truth of beings [*Seiende*], the *ἀλήθεια τῶν ὄντων*, is alone apprehended in the

pure concept. Philosophical cognition must first free itself from the constraints of language and myth; it must, as it were, eject these witnesses of 19
human poverty before it can rise to the pure ether of thought.

The *scientific cognition of nature* comes to apprehend its distinctive task in much the same way as pure philosophy. To find itself, it also had to first execute that great spiritual divorce [*Scheidung*], the intellectual κρίσις [crisis] through which it separated itself from myth and language. This act of separation [*Trennung*] designates the birth of philosophy, as it forms the starting point of empirical research and the mathematical determination of nature. In the beginnings of Greek philosophy, the two problems were still one and the same. Aristotle referred to the Ionian natural philosophers as the earliest "physiologists": they discovered the concept of *logos* through the concept of *physis*. And even where the *logos* had become independent, even where, as among the Pythagoreans, it was apprehended as a pure numerical relationship and to this extent was detached from the material of sensible perception, it retained its relation to *physis*. Number was the ground and source of all truth; however, this truth itself is only in that it is embodiment, that it appears in sensible things themselves as their harmony, their measure and order. Again, this conceptually "essential being" [*Wesenheit*], this *οὐσία* [ousia] and *ἀλήθεια* [truth] of number, did not abruptly spring forth but had to be slowly and gradually wrestled out of a foreign world. The Pythagorean number, the number of mathematics and natural science, was first uncovered in that in a steady intellectual process, it was reclaimed from the domains of mythical-magical number.

The scientific cognition of nature had the same struggle with linguistic concepts as with mythical concepts. It could not simply take over the divisions and separations, the connections and combinations [*Zusammenfassungen*] as they are present in language, but they must be replaced by differences and unities of an entirely different kind and an entirely other intellectual imprint. Whereas language is content with *naming*, science seeks *determination*; whereas language stops at the ambiguity of the name, science seeks the unambiguousness of the concept. However, in that from its initial scientific beginnings, the cognition of nature carries out this requirement, it therefore underwent an even sharper break with the worldview of "common experience." This cut, which is carried out here, not only separated the world of the word but separated also the world

of immediate perception from the world of natural-scientific "objects."
20 To penetrate to the sphere of these objects, to apprehend nature in its objective being and objective determinacy, thought must leave not only the domain of names but also that of sensible sensation and sensible intuition behind it.

One of the most original and fruitful features of Greek thinking, though the full significance of this fact is seldom appreciated, is that it performed both tasks at *once*. This was possible only because, by an equation that at first sight seems extremely strange and paradoxical, *sensible* reality was reinterpreted as a mere *linguistic* reality, a being of names. Whereas the common view of the world sees the most secure and unquestionable *reality* [*Realität*], a reality beyond any possible doubt, the philosophical view recognized the change and flux, the inconsistency and caprice of a mere *nomenclature*. "All things that mortals have established, believing in their truth," says Parmenides in his didactic poem, "are just a name: becoming and perishing, being and not-being, change of position, and alternation of bright color."[10] And here the semblance of logos of language is combated from the side of pure thought, from the side of the true *philosophical logos*, and this struggle designates the beginning and prelude of the scientific concept of nature. Democritus immediately takes up here where Parmenides left off: in the being of nature, the being of *physis*, he exhibits the same element that Parmenides had exhibited in pure thought, in logical being.

The truth of nature, too, does not lie immediately before our eyes but is discovered only if we succeed in distinguishing the world of things [*Sachen*] from the world of words, the permanent and necessary from the accidental and conventional. And it is not only our linguistic designations that are accidental and conventional but also the entire region of our sensible sensations. Sweet and bitter tastes, as well as color and tone, exist only "according to convention"; in truth, however, there are only atoms and empty space. And this coordination of sense qualities with linguistic signs, this reduction of their reality to a reality of names, is no merely isolated, historically conditioned feature in the emergence
21 of the scientific concept of nature. It is no accident that we encounter exactly the same turn of phrase where this concept is rediscovered in the philosophy and science of the Renaissance and where it is grounded in different methodological presuppositions. Again, Galileo now separates

"objective" determinations from merely "subjective" ones, "primary" qualities from "secondary" ones, in that he degrades the latter to the level of mere names. All the sensible properties that we customarily impute to a body, all the smells, tastes, and colors, are, in relation to the object in which we think of them as inhering, nothing but words, by which we designate not the nature of the object itself but only its effect on us, on the sentient organism. Insofar as thought is directed toward a physical being, it must endow this reality with determinate characteristics of quantity, shape, and number; it must think it as one or many, large or small, endowed with this or that spatial extension and figure [*Figur*]. On the other hand, it does not belong to this being that it be apprehended as red or white, bitter or sweet, fragrant or malodorous, because all these denominations are only signs that we use for changing states of being that, however, are external and accidental to being itself.[11]

It would seem as though this methodological *beginning* of the scientific cognition of nature, once achieved, must in a certain sense also signify its methodological *end*. The scientific cognition of nature no longer seems to be able to advance beyond this goal nor to inquire beyond it. For if it did so, it would also exceed the concept of the object [*Objekt*] thus gained and would appear to face a hopeless *regressus ad infinitum*. Behind every being that gives itself as true and objective there would now arise another being without which it would be impossible to call a halt to this progress and so secure an absolutely solid, unassailable "foundation" of cognition. For the *physicist* at least, there was no necessity – indeed he did not seem to have the right – to cede to this progress into the indeterminate. At some point, the physicist required something determinate and definitive – and this he found when he touched the solid ground [*Boden*] of mathematics. Once he reached this stratum, beginning from the mere signs and semblance world of sense sensation, he felt that he had won the right to stay there and take a rest, as it were. Even the modern physicist tends to dismiss any "epistemological" doubt as to the definitive character of his concept of reality. He finds a clear and conclusive definition of the actual when he defines, with Planck, the actual as the *measurable*. This domain of the measurable is and consists in itself: it bears itself and elucidates itself. The objectivity of the mathematical, the firm foundation of quantity and number, must not be shaken again; it must not be undermined and uprooted, as it were, by reflection.

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This dread of such an unrooting explains why natural science spurns the path of "dialectical" thinking, why the direction that is natural and appropriate to it consists of going back from observed appearances to principles in order to progress from principles to the inferences that can be deduced from them mathematically – not, however, in attempting to ground and legitimize these principles more deeply. Where science gives itself over to this, its first tendency, there is for it no sharp separation line between principles and objects [*Objekte*]. As the objectively *valid*, the principles form, at the same time, the *actual* in the true sense. Science is able at first to posit its basic determinations in no other way than by placing them before itself in tangible incarnations. There prevailed here, as it were, a methodological "materialism" that was by no means limited to the concept of matter but that can also be demonstrated in the other basic physical concepts, particularly that of "energy." The power of this basic tendency shows itself anew throughout the history of natural-scientific thinking – a striving to transpose function into substance, the relative into the absolute, quantitative concepts into thing concepts.

However, the theoretical development that physics has taken in the last decades shows, of course, the beginning preparations of a reversal: indeed, this reversal is perhaps that motive that gives all modern physics its *methodological* imprint. As long as the "classical" system of natural science, the system of Galilean-Newtonian dynamics, possessed undisputed validity, the principles on which it rested appeared to be the fundamental laws of nature themselves. In the concepts of space and time, mass and force, action and reaction, as defined by Newton, the basic framework of all physical reality seemed to have been established once and for all. The immanent progress of the scientific cognition of nature has
23 today increasingly cut the ground [*Boden*] from under this view. A single, as it were, rigid system of nature is replaced by systems that are to some extent open and mobile. The profound transformations that, in particular, the concept of substance has undergone, the progress from the physics of material mass to field physics, have now shown a new way for the critical self-awareness of physical knowledge [*Erkenntnis*].

The *same* thinker who through his discoveries prepared the way and made possible, in terms of the pure content, the new "electrodynamic worldview" was also the author of a "revolution of the mindset" in the field of physical theory: Heinrich Hertz is the modern researcher who,

in his "Principles of Mechanics" (1894), initially and most decisively effected the turn from the "picture theory" [*Abbildtheorie*] of physical knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] to a purely "symbolic theory." The basic concepts of natural science no longer appear as mere copies and reproductions of immediate tangible givens; rather, they are represented as constructive projects [*Entwürfe*] of physical thinking – as projects [*Entwürfe*] whose theoretical validity and significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] is not subject to any conditions other than the fact that their necessary consequences in thought [*denknotwendigen Folgen*] must always be consistent with that which is observable in experience.[12] In this sense, the whole world of physical concepts may now be defined as a world of pure "signs," as was done by Helmholtz in his theory of cognition. If we compare this turn with the basic epistemological presuppositions of the "classical" theory of nature, a distinctive contrast emerges. For while Galileo grasped sense qualities as "mere signs" (*puri nomi*), he had torn them out of the objective worldview of natural science. They bore a conventional, accidental, and contingent character that contradicts the objective necessity of nature. Cognition must overcome and cast off everything that is merely significative [*Signifikative*] in order to penetrate to the actual, to the truly real.

Now, however, the cut separating "subjective" appearance from objective-concrete [*objektiv-gegenständlich*] reality is carried out in a new sense. For neither sensation nor the mathematical-physical concept any longer raises the aspiration to be immediately congruent with the being of things in the absolute sense. Both have a purely indicative [*anzeigend*] 24
character: they are merely "indices" [*Indizes*] of reality, and the only difference between them is that the indications [*Anzeige*] inherently contain a different *value*, a different theoretical significance and general theoretical validity. The concept of the symbol has, however, virtually become a center and focus of the whole theory of physical cognition. It has been recognized and designated as such particularly in Duhem's investigations into the object and structure of physics. For Duhem, this concept forms the actual dividing line between mere *empiricism* and strict physical *theory*. Empiricism can apparently content itself with apprehending individual facts as provided by sensible observation and linking them to one another in a purely descriptive manner. However, no such description of concrete-sensible phenomena so much as approaches even the simplest

form of a physical concept, not to mention the form of a physical law. For laws are never mere summaries of perceptible states of affairs, through which the individual appearances are only strung onto a string. Rather, every law, as compared to immediate perception, comprises a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* – a transition to a new *form* of reflection. This can occur only when the concrete data provided by observation are replaced with symbolic representations, which on the basis of certain theoretical presuppositions that the observer accepts as true and valid are thought to correspond to them. Every physical *judgment* must necessarily move in this circle: it is by no means the mere constellation of a manifold of individual observable facts; rather, it expresses a relation between abstract concepts and symbolic concepts. The *significance* of these concepts is not accessible to immediate sensation but can be determined and ascertained only by a highly complex intellectual process of interpretation: precisely this process, this intellectual interpretation, constitutes the essence of physical theory.

Thus, there always remains a cleavage, a kind of hiatus, between the world of facts and the world of physical concepts. To speak of an identity or similarity between the contents of these two worlds has no intelligible sense. Rather, there is always a disparity between the "practical" fact, which can actually be observed, and the *theoretical* fact, i.e., the formula in which the physicist *expresses* his observation. For between the
25 two stands the whole, highly complex intellectual labor, by virtue of which a narrative about concrete occurrences and events is replaced by a judgment, which as such has a purely abstract significance and cannot be formulated except by the application of certain symbolic signs.[13] Of course, this does not mean that the modern epistemology of physics, in opposition to the classical theory, renounces every claim of reality for the physical concepts – however, it does mean that it *defines* this claim differently from them and must *mediate* it in a far more complex way. The cognition of the symbolic character of these concepts does not conflict with their objective validity; rather, it forms an element in this validity itself and in its theoretical grounding. This opens up a great number of new problems whose *solution* we shall not enter into for the moment;[14] for our introductory considerations, it is sufficient for the time being to bear the question in mind and assign it its systematic position within our investigation as a whole.

3. THE "IMMEDIACY" OF INNER EXPERIENCE: THE OBJECT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The objection now arises, however, that our consideration here was bound to miss its goal because this goal lies external to the approach that we have up to now taken. When we ask whether there is any possibility that thinking may break through the stratum of the merely symbolic and significative [*Signifikative*] to apprehend behind it the "immediate," unveiled reality, this goal, if it can be reached at all, obviously cannot be attained by way of "outer" experience. After all the progress made by epistemological analysis in the domain of modern physics, it is scarcely open to serious doubt that the cognition of the *world of things* is bound up with specific theoretical presuppositions and conditions and that consequently the process of *objectivization* as it is undertaken in the cognition of nature is always at the same time a process of logical *mediation*, a process of mediatization. It now seems, however, all the more necessary to 26
reverse the direction of the consideration. We should seek true "immediacy" not in the things outside us but in ourselves. Not nature, as the ensemble of *objects* in space and time, but our own I – not the world of objects [*Objekte*] but the world of our existence, of our lived-experience of reality – seems able to lead us to the threshold of this immediacy. Thus, if we wish to catch sight of reality itself, free from all refracting media, we must submit to the guidance of "inner" experience instead of outer experience. We shall never find the truly simple and ultimate element [*Element*] of all reality in things; however, no doubt it must be detectable in our own consciousness. Should not the analysis of *consciousness* lead us to something ultimate and original, neither susceptible of nor requiring any further dissection – something that may be clearly and unambiguously recognized as the originary-existence [*Urbestand*] of all reality [*Realität*]?

With this question, we are brought to the point where metaphysics and psychology immediately come into contact and in which they seem to fuse indissolubly into one another. In the history of philosophy, this process of fusion is most clearly exhibited in Berkeley, whose *Principles of Human Knowledge* begins with a critique of language that is amplified into a critique of all *purely* conceptual "abstract" thinking. Abstraction is rejected because the more we rely on it, the more it threatens to enclose us to

the circle of the merely mediated. For this reason, it can never become an organ of metaphysics, because metaphysical cognition aspires to be a theory of the immediate. We do not apprehend this immediate by abandoning ourselves to an investigation of nature, by reducing its appearances to laws and stating the laws in the formulas of mathematics. Rather, it discloses itself to us only if we reject this magic of conceptual formulas, if we take the world of inner perception as it shows itself to us before all artificial, abstract transformations. Pure experience, which is the sole source and kernel of all our cognition of reality, can never be sought somewhere other than in our simple, originary-perceptions [*Urperzeptionen*], untouched by theoretical reinterpretations. The being of perception is the sole certain and utterly unproblematical originary-datum of all cognition. A thorough reversal, a reevaluation of all values, has taken place here, as compared with the epistemology on which classical natural science was based.

27 To affirm the reality [*Realität*] of its objects [*Objekte*], classical epistemology had to degrade sensation to subjective "appearance" and ultimately set it down as a mere name. Now, however, the opposite thesis is valid: sensation has become the wholly real and matter a mere name. For Berkeley, precisely the natural-scientific concept of matter [*Materie*] must serve as the prime example by which to uncover the weakness and impotence of "abstract" concept formation. "Matter" [*Materie*] is given in no individual perception; it is itself neither visible nor palpable; thus, if we go back to its basic signification, nothing remains of it but a "general idea," which like all general ideas, possesses no archetype [*Urbild*] in things but simply dissolves into the generality of a word. At best, the concept of matter [*Materie*] yields a vague and elusive nominal definition of actuality, while its real definition is to be found only in the ambit of sensible impression, in its individual being-a-certain-way [*Sosein*] and in its individual differences [*Differenzen*]. Thus, it is the critique of language that becomes the foundation for the critique of cognition. Berkeley distinguishes a *double form of language* to show by them the specific difference in the character of validity of our cognitions. For him, perception itself, the entire ensemble of sensible phenomena, is valid as a form of language – however, in this form of language, we are dealing not with the conventional language of words and signs but rather with the original language in which the metaphysical originary-being [*Urwesen*], God,